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TAGS: [PBTS](#) [PREL](#) [WI](#) [MO](#) [UNSC](#) [XI](#)
SUBJECT: UNSC DISCUSSES WESTERN SAHARA AND RENEWAL OF
MINURSO

Classified By: Ambassador Rice, For Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: The Security Council on April 22 held closed consultations on the question of Western Sahara and the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). Edmond Mulet, the Assistant Secretary-General of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), and Christopher Ross, the Personal Envoy of the Secretary General, respectively briefed the Council on the operations of MINURSO, and the status of negotiations between Morocco and the Polisario. All delegations supported the extension of MINURSO's mandate for one year, welcomed the appointment of Christopher Ross and his initial contact with the parties, and in varying degrees encouraged progress on the humanitarian situation of the Sahrawi refugees. End Summary.

¶2. (C) In the first meeting of the Security Council on the issue of Western Sahara since April 2008, Edmond Mulet, Assistant Secretary-General of DPKO, opened the meeting and summarized the Secretary-General's report on Western Sahara (published on April 14, 2009). Mulet said the situation in Western Sahara was generally calm, despite sporadic tensions between the Polisario and the Royal Moroccan Army (RMA). He said the five civilians injured in early April from a mine explosion while demonstrating in front of an RMA post highlighted the need for a peaceful solution to the impasse. Despite the incident, however, Mulet said the 800 demonstrators aligned with the Polisario did not violate the cease-fire agreement between Morocco and the Polisario because the demonstrators were unarmed. Mulet said MINURSO enjoyed good relations with the RMA and the Polisario. He indicated that issues related to human rights continued to be at the forefront of rhetoric and accusations between the parties, but he recalled that MINURSO has no specific human-rights monitoring mandate to follow through on these statements.

The New Envoy Sets the Stage

¶3. (C) Christopher Ross said that in the three months since his appointment, he had held discussions with the parties, the neighboring states, the Group of Friends, and Council members. Ross said his initial exchanges with King Mohammed VI, Polisario Secretary-General Abdelaziz, and President Bouteflika showed that their positions had not changed on Western Sahara since the fourth round of talks in Manhasset. According to Ross, their intransigence derives from the parties' completely different readings of successive Security Council resolutions and the 1975 International Court of Justice ruling and other pronouncements. To move the parties from their hardened positions, Ross recommended small, informal meetings of the parties (to include participation of Algeria) prior to a fifth round of formal negotiations in Manhasset.

14. (C) Ross said the Polisario had repeatedly expressed the view that the UN should act to settle the dispute, citing various plans of James Baker, the former Personal Envoy. Ross said he had expressed to the Polisario that the UN cannot impose a solution, but conceded that while the Baker plans per se are no longer on the table, any elements the parties deem useful, including a transitional period and a referendum, can be revived if the parties agree. Ross noted that the one issue that has consistently emerged in his talks was human rights, with the Polisario calling for a human-rights regime to be established in the territories and Morocco claiming that its human-rights record had improved dramatically and the Polisario used this issue only for political gain.

Council Members Agree on Broad Issues, Differ on Tactics

15. (C) All 15 Security Council members demonstrated unanimity in their warm welcome to Ross and in his initial approach with the parties. Uganda was the first delegation to speak, with the Ugandan Ambassador commending Ross for his efforts in carrying out his mandate and in his consulting with the parties early in the process. Ambassador Rice said the U.S. strongly supports Ross' plan to hold preparatory meetings and called upon the parties to negotiate in good faith and without preconditions. The UK Counselor said the UK believed that the parties should re-energize the process under Ross' guidance, and the French Ambassador said he was glad that the parties had expressed their support to meet informally prior to a fifth round of negotiations. The Russian delegate

supported Ross' approach to hold informal negotiations and was happy to see the parties had accepted Ross' proposal. Furthermore, the Russian delegate said the Ross' contact with James Baker was important and that Baker's proposals still remained relevant. France was the only delegation to voice support for Morocco's autonomy proposal, which had "breathed new life" into a hitherto moribund process.

16. (C) Although differing in approach and language, all Council members raised the humanitarian issue, whether by focusing on success made in demining and confidence-building measures, or in calling for more serious UN engagement on human rights. Uganda was the only delegation to call for, without caveats, the expansion of MINURSO's mandate to include a human-rights monitoring role, explaining that MINURSO was the only contemporary peace-keeping mission that lacked such a mandate. Moreover, Uganda was the only delegation to explicitly raise the issue of exploitation of Western Sahara's phosphate mines and its fisheries. Referring to the Security Council debate the previous day on mediation of disputes, the Costa Rican delegate asked why MINURSO was an exception to the general call for human-rights monitoring in other missions. However, Costa Rica did not formally request an expansion of the mandate but said the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights should have a role in Western Sahara. The Mexican Ambassador said he realized that adding a human-rights mandate to MINURSO was a difficult and potentially politicizing action to take, but he opined that any such mandate would have to be balanced to avoid alienating the parties. Russia said that although human-rights monitoring was not part of MINURSO's current mandate, the mission still serves as a venue for promoting humanitarian issues. Austria called on the parties to continue to cooperate with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

17. (C) Echoing the recommendation of the Secretary-General's report, all members agreed to a one-year extension of MINURSO (until April 30, 2010). The Japanese Ambassador called for the UN to provide a mid-term report of the status of negotiations; the Costa Rican delegate asked for a "progress report" and said he was specifically emphasizing the "progress" part of the phrase. Russia did not call for a

specific briefing or report but requested that the Council be kept apprised of the status of negotiations.

Rice